



R_x Folic Acid:

4 Steps For Counseling Women At Increased Risk For NTDs

Many women who are at increased risk for neural tube defects (NTDs) like spina bifida are not familiar with the amount of folic acid they need and when to start taking it. The US Public Health Service recommends that all women who could become pregnant should take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid daily through a vitamin. Women at increased risk for having an NTD-affected pregnancy should take 4000 mcg of folic acid by prescription for 1 month before becoming pregnant and during the first three months of pregnancy.

Women listen to their health care professional's advice on folic acid. Folic acid advice or counseling can be done in seconds. If you feel that you don't have enough time during a patient visit, assign a member of your medical team to be your "folic acid counselor," e.g. obstetrician-gynecologist, nurse, family practitioner, medical office worker, or genetic counselor. If you don't have an assigned "folic acid counselor," assume that **you** are the counselor.

① What to say...

- "Are you taking folic acid? All women of childbearing age need to take a multivitamin with folic acid every day."

Why...

- Many women at increased risk for NTDs report that few health care providers counsel them about folic acid. Women need to know general information about folic acid.

② What to say...

- "Folic acid cannot guarantee having a healthy baby, but it helps reduce the risk of birth defects like spina bifida."

Why...

- Allaying guilt feelings is important for women who have already had a child with an NTD like spina bifida.

③ What to say...

- "Plan your next pregnancy. You'll need ten times more folic acid by prescription for 1 month before you try to become pregnant."

Why...

- Women are not sure how much folic acid they need before their next pregnancy or when they need to start taking it. Women need to know the recommendation and appreciate factual information.

④ What to say...

- "Many factors influence pregnancy like your genes and your environment. Do what you can by taking folic acid everyday."

Why...

- Women need to be reassured that folic acid is effective in reducing their risk. Women can have a sense of control over their situation by taking folic acid everyday.

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